DOCUMENT RESUME

HE 000 113

ED 024 336

By- Corson, John J.

From Authority to Leadership.

National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, Washington, D.C.

Pub Date 11 Nov 68

Note- 20p.; Paper presented at conference of National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, Washington, D.C., November 11, 1968.

EDRS Price MF- $0.25 HC- $1.10

Descriptors- Administration, *Administrative Policy, Administrative Problems, College Administration, *Educational Administration, Governance, *Higher Education, Leadership Responsibility, Political Power, *Power Structure, Presidents, *University Administration

Colleges and universities are experiencing the consequences of the technological, urbanization and human rights revolutions that have plagued American society during the 60s. Enrollments have increased, new emphasis is placed on reorientation of curricula, teaching practices, specialization, and admission requirements. The university's size, function and relation to its environment has been considerably transformed; however, to meet modern societal needs, it must also alter the traditional management of its affairs. Obstacles to this change include the lack of communication between professors of different disciplines, the power of departments and boards in decision making, presidents who lack administrative abilities, the struggle to remain autonomous, and the inability to deal with student needs. The authority to decide on this change rests only with the president, yet the character of his position almost precludes his taking charge. He must, therefore, redistribute this authority among faculty members, trustees, students, alumni, coordinating boards and himself in order to administrate university affairs more effecti"ely. (WM)

ED0 24336

FROM AUTHORITY TO LEADERSHIP

Remarks by John J. Corson before the

Association of State Colleges and Univerisites

November 11, 1968, Washington, D. C.

HE000 113

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

FROM AUTHORITY TO LEADERSHIP

Remarks by John J. Corson before the
Association of State Colleges and Universities
November 11, 1968, Washington, D.C.

To say that American colleges and universities are in turmoil is not, I think you will agree, to engage in hyperbole. Some of the richest of the private institutions face financial crises. A spate of college and university presidents have resigned - or given up. Faculties manifest at least as much discontent as is their custom, and in notable instances have sided with students in vigorous protest against institutional policies. And on more than two score campuses, students have openly rebelled. This adds up indeed to turmoil.

What are the roots of this turmoil?

REVOLUTIONS FORCE CHANGE

Every institution has experienced, in some measure the consequences of three revolutions that have wracked the American society during the 60's - the technological revolution, the urbanization revolution, and the human rights revolution.

The first and most obvious consequence of these revolutions is a new emphasis on education, and a burgeoning growth in enrollment. "Higher education" was regarded only a generation ago, "as really quite a nice thing if you could afford it,

and if you had time for it, and if the society could afford it,"* It is no longer simply "a gratifying personal possession" but in the words of Rosemary Park, "a public necessity. It is required not just in order to produce an educated electorate, which democracy has always required but to support....the socio-technical structure within which we live and move."**

The second consequence of these revolutions is the enthronement of the specialist, and greatly increased emphasis on professionalism. The university professor, like specialists in every kind of organization, has gained added status and responsibility.

A third consequence is the reorientation of curricula, course content and teaching practices toward graduate education*** and the reorientation of admission practices and curricula to meet the impact of the human rights revolution. That impact is seen in efforts on many campuses to recruit an increasing number of students from poor families and an increasing number of Negroes. It is seen also in the establishment of institutes to study the causes of poverty or Afro-American culture.

---

* John W. Gardner, No Easy Victories, p. 91

** The Key Reporter, Summer 1968

*** Riesman and Jencks, The Academic Revolution, Chapter XII pp. 510-545

The fourth consequence is that the university has changed in size, in function and in its relation to its environment. The change in size is obvious in the growth in most institutions represented here. The change in function is reflected in a vast increase in research budgets and in the variety of services faculty members are asked to provide for government and for business.

Like it or not the university has been drawn into the maelstrom of the work-a-day world; the academic and the non-academic worlds have become not only "interdependent, they are interpenetrating".*

The change of the world about it has made a museum piece of the residential college under the elms that you and I knew a generation ago. Pittsburgh's Tower of Learning and Illinois' campus on the waterfront of Chicago symbolize the "sidewalk university" that educates a major proportion of all students in the late 1960s.

The fifth, and an important consequence of these revolutions, is the undermining of the patriarch - the parent, the adult over forty, the preacher, as well as the professor, the dean, the president and the trustees. The young person who

---

* Talcott Parsons, "The Academic System: A Sociologist's View," Public Interest, Fall 1968

has experienced himself the advent of the Salk vaccine, the transistor, the heart transplant, the satellite and the New Economics, comes to doubt that the wisdom of professors is fundamental and unchanging. "Experience" Coleridge wrote decades ago, "is like the stern lights on a ship. It illuminates only the past".

The sixth, and a closely related, consequence is the demand for relevance in the intellectual menu they are offered. John Gardner told the American Council on Education last month: "Students complain with reason that their undergraduate experience does not prepare them to become involved with or to understand contemporary urban life." Faculty members from middle-class, white backgrounds and small city or rural environments, using texts written by others with similar backgrounds, may not realize how little they communicate to that increasing proportion of all students that are drawn from low income, slum environments.

But Gardner spoke of only a part of this demand for relevance. Students have voiced this demand in relation to a host of other problems they see in their lives - the draft, Vietnam, strikes by teachers and racial tensions for example. And these students have made clear their resentment of faculty

members who look for intellectual challenge to the government of New Delhi or the schools of Somaliland and can find nothing of interest in the problems at home. And particularly the experience that students bring from the city to the campus leads substantial numbers to resent their being treated as those Olympians, Jacques Barzun and George Kennan would have us do - as young inexperienced, naive and emotionally undisciplined adolescents. I think this view greatly underestimates the educational influence of the city, and I speak not of the museum, the art gallery, the library, the theatre or the zoo, but of the workplace, the supermarket, the bus, the labor union, and the playground.

Some complain that we are expecting a bit of everything from the university, that we are expecting the university to train the young, produce the lawyers, doctors and other professionals the society needs, to carry on research, provide services needed by business, government and foreign lands and, of course, entertain the public with athletic spectacles and provide a lovers' lane for the upcoming generation. The result, Henry Steele Commager contends is that "the university reels drunkenly from task to task, and from activity to happening."

I see, and I suspect you see, no turning back. The revolutions through which we are living have created a new society

and new social needs that the society looks to its universities to meet. To meet these needs the universities must change - not only in size, in function and in relation to their environment - but in the ways they manage their affairs. This latter change has not been made. It has not been made because this country's colleges and universities inherit six fundamental presumptions as to how authority for the conduct of their affairs should be distributed among the participants, and these presumptions have resisted and prevented change.

PRESUMPTIONS UNDERLYING GOVERNANCE

What are these presumptions?

A Body of Scholars

The first is that the college consists of a body of scholars. The word "college" remember, means a group of people engaged in a common pursuit, in this instance the pursuit of knowledge. But train your mind's eye on your own institution and consider whether there is a substantial and continual exchange of ideas among faculty members. Or is this concept a bit of the mythology of academic governance?

The concept of community among scholars has been eroded away by:

the increasing size of the faculty,

the physical dispersion of the homes of faculty members over a metropolitan area,

the proliferation of subject matter that has accompanied the increasing emphasis on specialization (there is little exchange of ideas between the professors of physics and of physical education).

Like the Cabots, the Lowells and the Lodges, mathematicians may speak to physicists and physicists to astrophysicists, but not to a soft scientist, let us such as a political scientist.

The Department Reigns

The second presumption is that such basic decisions as who shall serve on the faculty and when they shall be granted tenure and promoted, what courses shall be taught, curricula and degrees offered, what time each faculty member shall give to teaching as distinguished from research - that these decisions are best made by the department, i.e., by the faculty of a particular discipline.

This is no mythology. The more an institution gains size and prestige the more power is claimed by the department. And experience suggests that the more power exercised by the department, the more surely will the educational program suffer

from a narrow provincialism. The department has been branded the "veto agent" of academic governance, and indeed it is a bloc to any form of interdisciplinary innovation.

The Scholar Administers

The third presumption is that the administration of the college or university is a task for which only educators are qualified; that the president's task is still predominantly that of formulating educational policy and should be filled by a scholar whatever else his talents may be.

It is said of a girl that if she does not have the intangible quality described as "charm" (whatever that may be), it doesn't much matter what else (figure, bust or singing voice) she does have: So it is with the university president, if he does not have that intangible capacity to administer the affairs of a large institution, it doesn't much matter what else (a Nobel prize, a list of books he authored, or the presidency of his national professional society) he does have.

For all our sentimental admiration for the president who can write Greek verses or can recall the words of an obscure Portuguese poet, we admire in fact the president who can wheedle larger current and capital appropriations from biennium from the state coordinating board, the governor, and

the legislature while keeping the faculty happy by noble visions of an expanding plant, a growing enrollment, a richer educational program and a more prestigious faculty.

The Board Controls - Or Does It

The fourth presumption of academic governance is that final authority for all that goes on in the institution rests with the governing board.

Most boards in practice are told little, and know little about the substance of the educational program, seldom dare to do other than "rubber stamp" faculty appointments, review but seldom challenge the budget for educational and research affairs.

Most boards concentrate their energies on obtaining funds, supervising the building program and nurturing the institution's public relations - and perform an infinitely valuable service in these areas. The handicap lies in the presumption that the board will exercise authority over all that goes on in the institution.

That handicap was made manifest of late when critical disputes with faculty or with students arose on several campuses, the trustees were unprepared to be of much help to administrations that had isolated them from faculty and students.

Autonomy is Essential

The fifth presumption is that to retain its objectivity and to preserve academic freedom for its teachers the college or university must be free of the state, the church or other interests that support it, and free of the society it serves. It must have autonomy we have claimed.

Yet the university is steadily becoming a public utility -- in the sense that higher education is increasingly an essential for much of the population, and in the sense that the talents its faculty possesses are increasingly needed in solving the problems of the society.

Hence, it is doubtful if the university can claim a separateness and a freedom from the society it serves. It must have protection that will insure its scholars can follow those inquiries they believe important and speak and write what their minds and their consciences dictate. But autonomy in the literal sense it has been argued for in the past was never claimed by the land grant college, and it will not be available to the university of the future.

Students' Role

The sixth presumption is that students are immature and inexperienced and should listen, and speak only when spoken to.

The great bulk, of all students in 1968 (including the handful that have had the riots) are older, better educated, more mature and more concerned* than those boys and girls who were on the campus when you and I were there. And the great bulk of all students in 1968 -- not all -- bring with them to the campus an awareness of the essentiality of higher education, and a distrust of the patriarch that the technological revolution has bred, the frustrations and resentments that the city has bred, and a social concern for one's fellow man that the human rights revolution has bred.

It is these realities that underlie the claims heard today for "student power", and it is these realities that make essential the reconsideration of the role of students in academic governance.

THE PRESIDENT MUST TAKE CHARGE

If I have exaggerated either the absoluteness of these presumptions of the extent of their invalidity, then I defend myself on the grounds that Stephen Leacock articulated a quarter of a century ago: "A half truth", he said, " like a half brick carries best in argument". In fact there is much more than

---

* For relevant evidence see Martin Duberman, "On Misunderstanding Student Rebels", Atlantic Monthly, November, 1968.

half truth in the assertion that we must find ways of revising these precepts of governance that now hobble the university in conducting its affairs.

Who will find these ways?

Who will make of the university an institution equal to today's demands upon it?

The only person available to make a viable institution of the university is its president. Yet the character of the university presidency makes it difficult for the president to take charge.

The position of the university president differs markedly from that of other executives, the general manager of a department store, the president of a manufacturing plant, or the administrator of a Federal agency, for example.

1. To a greater degree than any other kind of administrator, he <u>shares</u> the opportunity and authority for decision making which is, after all, the heart of administration. He shares with the faculty the opportunity to make decisions as to educational program, faculty selection and promotion, student admissions and discipline, and as the institution grows larger and the faculty more prestigious, the president's share of authority to make educational decisions tends to

decline. The fixity of the large expenditure for faculty salaries means pragmatically, that the president cannot use the budget to influence the course of educational programs materially. And when it comes to new buildings or matters of public relations, the trustees "feel more at home," and he shares with them the right to decide such questions.

He shares with the alumni the control of athletics. In many states, the state university president shares with the Governor and a variety of lesser state officials or boards, the authority to decide matters of personnel, finance, purchasing and buildings. And he shares with powerful constituencies throughout the state - the organized farmers, organized liberals, organized educators, and others - you know them - the right to formulate policies and even budgets for some parts of the institution for which he is responsible.

2. The university president's right or opportunity to supply initiatives, to suggest change or reform is similarly limited. Harold Dodds, a sage and experienced university president, counseled the president not to be afraid to propose innovation. The term "not to be afraid" is significant. Dodds recognized, as many a president has learned, that if he becomes identified with any substantial innovation, he gives it "the kiss of death." The sociology of the institution, in short,

makes it more difficult for the president to supply the yeast that ensures ferment within an enterprise.

3. The university president is substantially denied authority to carry out the basic executive function of quality control, of ensuring that performance matches objectives. He has no such readily available means for appraising the quality of the teaching and research as the manufacturing executive has of appraising the quality of product that comes off his production line. Many a governmental executive similarly lacks means of quality control, and like the university president has limited authority to change the people through whom he must get things done. As between the governmental executive and the university president the significant difference lies in the degree to which the academic president is granted the <u>right, and acknowledged to have the capability, of evaluating the quality of the operation being performed</u>.

These handicaps are built in to the university presidency by its distinctive characteristics as an organization. <u>Its product is not an organizational product</u> as is the car that comes off the Ford assembly line, or even the policy that is formulated by the bureaucracy within the State Department. The product of the university is a totality of the products of many individual

scholars and teachers for which the university provides support and protection. Its structure is less hierarchial than that of other organizations and such ranking of individuals within the hierarchy as there is based on the premise that some people know more than other people, not that some people need direction by other people. It has no overall plan of work against which progress can be measured, and by which a president or his dean can appraise periodically what the individual has done.

REDISTRIBUTING AUTHORITY

The problem of stilling turmoil on the campus is, in the final analysis, a political problem - political is the best sense of that term. It is a problem of redistributing authority among faculty members, president, trustees, students, alumni and coordinating boards. The distribution of authority set by the six presumptions inherited from the liberal arts college of a century ago make no sense for the large multi-function university of the 1970's. They offer only what in the vernacular must be described as a "hell of a way to run a railroad".

If a better way is to be found, and it is being found (look for example at what Sam Gould has accomplished in one

of the most difficult settings of all), it will be found by the president. How?

From looking over the shoulders of several presidents I offer these five suggestions:

First, he must take the lead in recreating a community of his institution. He must devise ways of bringing faculty members, from the various disciples, from separate schools, and even from geographically separated campuses together, of bringing students and faculty members and students and trustees together, and of bringing faculty members and trustees into regular face-to-face discussion.

If the president continues to insist, as his institution grows larger, that he shall be the switchboard through which all communication shall go, he will stunt the advance of his institution - and limit his tenure as president.

Second, he must wrack his imagination to find ways to break down the isolation and the stultifying authority of the department. Presidents have done this in the past by inventing committees, divisions, institutes and centers. They have used these and other means to make the discipline oriented specialists face around intellectually and join with other specialists in applying his intelligence to the resolution of a problem rather than exclusively to the spinning out of

a gossamer web of theory in his own field. These ways have sufficed on only a few campuses. Still additional ways must be invented.

Third, he must - quite surreptitiously - put to work in the office of the president the best methods of educational and administrative management that have been devised. A lot has been learned of late as to how to evaluate the effect of colleges on students, as to how to relate the benefits of educational programs to costs, and as to comparative costs of administration among institutions. If the president doesn't seek and apply the best techniques that have been developed, and sufficient staff, he simply can't be informed as to what is going on and where resources are needed in the sprawling dispersed and complex institution. If he doesn't conceal the modernity of his practice under a facade of old shoe, tweedy, pipe smoking convivality, his faculty will likely laugh him off the campus and his trustees won't recognize him as the scholar they chose for the job.

Fourth, he must press for a redefinition of the responsibilities and the authority of faculty, trustees, students and administration. This is the toughest most needed and most difficult task of all. It involves persuading the faculty to delegate to the president much of the authority

it now claims for itself. It involves persuading the trustees to spend more time on the job, to resolve to learn more about the educational and research aspects of the university and the real quality of the faculty, and then having acquired a fuller understanding of what it is all about to reconstitute the board itself to include (a) individuals who know more about education than buildings, finance and state politics and (b) individuals who are aware of or determined to know continuingly the views of the faculty and the students. And it involves the replacement of the old play-acting forms of student government by the inclusion of students on many or most significant faculty and trustee committees.

Fifth, he must speak out -- but subtly and with tact and uncanny timing. If he would take charge he must be heard from and yet he seldom can give orders. Faculties can be led but can not be bossed. Trustees can be pampered but can not be directed. And students who could be <u>told</u> a decade ago now be listened to before decisions that affect them are made. The president can and must say what he believes should be done, but he says it with a keen realization that <u>the essence of his job is the engineering of consent, not the giving of commands</u>.

These tasks - difficult of accomplishment, and filled

with the prospect of resentment - fall on the president because he is the only individual in each institution that gives his whole time, his whole energies, and his whole concern to the affairs of the university. (The trustees are part-timers; the students short-timers. The dean is myopically concerned with his school; the department chairman with his discipline). He, the president, will succeed in effecting the redistribution of authority that is needed only if he cloaks his quest for the authority he needs under a heap of listening, and the words and deeds of leadership.

But succeed he must -- for not only does the future of the university hang on his ability effectively to put himself in charge, but the well being of our society increasingly depends on his success.